

REMARKS

An excess claim fee payment letter is submitted herewith for one (1) additional independent claim.

Claims 1-4, 7, 9-10, and 29-43 are all the claims presently pending in the application.

Claims 1-3, 7, and 10 are amended to more clearly define the invention, claims 5-6, 8, and 11-28 are canceled and claims 29-43 are added. Claims 1, 3, 7, 10, and 43 are independent.

These amendments are made only to more particularly point out the invention for the Examiner and not for narrowing the scope of the claims or for any reason related to a statutory requirement for patentability.

Applicants also note that, notwithstanding any claim amendments herein or later during prosecution, Applicants' intent is to encompass equivalents of all claim elements.

Applicants gratefully acknowledge that claims 3-4, and 10-12 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. This Amendment rewrites claims 3 and 10 into independent form thereby placing these claims into condition for immediate allowance. However, Applicants respectfully submit that all of the claims are allowable.

Claims 1 and 7 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by the Derleth et al. reference (U.S. Patent No. 6,234,569). Claims 1-2 and 7-8 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by the Lindberg et al. reference (U.S. Patent No. 6,073,987). Claims 7, and 9 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by the Lorenz et al. reference (U.S. Patent No. 4,733,739).

These rejections are respectfully traversed in the following discussion

I. THE CLAIMED INVENTION

A first exemplary embodiment of the claimed invention, as defined, for example, by claim 1, is directed to a blower unit mounting structure that includes an instrument panel including an upper panel and a lower panel that are vertically divided along a transverse direction of a vehicle body, a steering support beam fixed to the lower panel, and a blower unit fixed to the lower panel and to the steering support beam to form a unitized component.

The lower panel is upwardly open to provide access from above.

A second exemplary embodiment of the claimed invention, as defined, for example, by claim 43, is directed to a blower unit mounting structure that includes an instrument panel including an upper panel and a lower panel, a steering support beam connected to the lower panel, and a blower unit connected to the steering support beam and the lower panel. The blower unit includes a duct for mounting to an opening in a vertical wall surface of a front bulkhead.

Conventionally vehicles having a transversely extending steering support beam have had their blower units mounted to the steering support beam only after the steering support beam was mounted on the vehicle body. However, this causes great difficulty when mounting the blower unit in the vehicle in a narrow passenger compartment.

In particular, when fastening the blower unit to the toe board, the mechanic is forced to do the fastening work from below the steering support beam in an uncomfortable posture. This causes an increase in the risk of mounting inaccuracy.

Additionally, it has been very difficult to fasten the blower unit, which has been incorrectly fastened to the toe board, to fasten the blower unit to the instrument panel.

In stark contrast, the first exemplary embodiment of the present invention provides an instrument panel that includes a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above. By dividing the instrument panel into an upper panel and a lower panel, a mechanic may then easily align the ducts from the blower unit to an opening in the vehicle bulkhead and affix the blower unit to the vehicle body from the upper side of the lower panel (page 8, line 10 - page 11, line 23), rather, than from below the instrument panel as has conventionally been done.

In this manner, the present invention greatly improves the ease and accuracy of mounting the blower unit in the vehicle.

The second exemplary embodiment of the present invention provides a blower unit that includes a duct for mounting to an opening in a vertical wall surface of a front bulkhead. This feature is important for taking in outside air and improving mounting workability and accuracy.

II. THE PRIOR ART REJECTIONS

A. The 102(e) Derleth et al. reference rejection

The Examiner alleges that the Derleth et al. reference teaches the claimed invention. Applicants submit, however, that there are elements of the claimed invention which are neither taught nor suggested by the Derleth et al. reference.

Specifically, the Derleth et al. reference does not teach or suggest the features of the present invention including a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above. As explained above, by providing a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above, a mechanic may then easily align the ducts from the blower unit to an opening in the

vehicle bulkhead and affix the blower unit to the vehicle body from the upper side of the lower panel (page 8, line 10 - page 11, line 23), rather, than from below the instrument panel as has conventionally been done.

In this manner, the present invention greatly improves the ease and accuracy of mounting the blower unit in the vehicle.

Rather, the Derleth et al. reference discloses a subassembly 10 that includes a shell-like duct component 16 and “various outlets as illustrated in Fig. 5.” that receive a supply of air from a fan housing 24. All of these ducts are illustrated relative to the subassembly 10.

The Derleth et al. reference does not teach or suggest a duct of a blower unit that is aligned with an opening in a bulkhead, let alone a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above.

Moreover, regarding new independent claim 43, the Derleth et al. reference does not appear to teach or suggest the feature of a blower unit that includes a duct for mounting to an opening in a vertical wall surface of a front bulkhead. As explained above, this feature is important for taking in outside air and improving mounting workability and accuracy.

Therefore, the Derleth et al. reference does not teach or suggest each and every element of the claimed invention. Therefore, the Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw this rejection of claims 1 and 7.

B. The 102(e) Lindberg et al. reference rejection

Regarding the rejection of claims 1-2, and 7-8, the Examiner alleges that the Lindberg et al. reference teaches the claimed invention. Applicants submit, however, that there are elements of the claimed invention which are neither taught nor suggested by the Lindberg et

al. reference.

The Lindberg et al. reference does not teach or suggest the features of the present invention including a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above. As explained above, by providing a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above, a mechanic may then easily align the ducts from the blower unit to an opening in the vehicle bulkhead and affix the blower unit to the vehicle body from the upper side of the lower panel (page 8, line 10 - page 11, line 23), rather, than from below the instrument panel as has conventionally been done.

In this manner, the present invention greatly improves the ease and accuracy of mounting the blower unit in the vehicle.

The Lindberg et al. reference appears to disclose an instrument panel 30 that includes a base module 32 that has an intermediate plenum bottom 36 and a platform 38. The intermediate plenum bottom 36 and the platform 38 are formed of a structurally rigid material (col. 3, line 65 - col. 4, line 17; col. 6, lines 56-59; and col. 7, lines 54-61). A steering column support 50 may be mounted to the platform 38 (col. 4, lines 34-39).

The Examiner alleges that the vertically extending wall 40 of the platform 38 that is disclosed by the Lindberg et al. reference corresponds to the claimed front bulkhead, that the bezel 256 and the knee bolster 259 correspond to the claimed lower panel, that the blower unit 56 corresponds to the claimed blower unit, and that the fresh air inlet aperture 86 in the platform 38 corresponds to the claimed opening in the bulkhead.

However, in stark contrast to the present invention, the air inlet opening 112 of the blower assembly 256 is not accessible from above. Rather, the air inlet opening 112 of the blower assembly 256 is only accessible from below the platform 38 to align the air inlet

opening 112 with the fresh air inlet aperture.

Therefore, the panel assembly that is disclosed by the Lindberg et al. reference suffers from the same problems that are solved by the present invention. With the present invention, the positioning of the duct relative to the opening in the bulkhead and mounting of the duct to the bulkhead can be implemented with ease while observing from the upper portion side of the lower panel. Thus, mounting workability and accuracy is improved (page 11, lines 12-16).

Thus, contrary to the Examiner's allegations, the Lindberg et al. reference does not teach or suggest the features of the present invention including a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above. As explained above, by providing a lower panel that is upwardly open, a mechanic may then easily align the ducts from the blower unit to an opening in the vehicle bulkhead and affix the blower unit to the vehicle body from the upper side of the lower panel (page 8, line 10 - page 11, line 23), rather, than from below the instrument panel as has conventionally been done.

In this manner, the present invention greatly improves the ease and accuracy of mounting the blower unit in the vehicle.

Regarding new claim 43, the Lindberg et al. reference does not teach or suggest the feature of a blower unit that includes a duct for mounting to an opening in a vertical wall surface of a front bulkhead. As explained above, this feature is important for taking in outside air and improving mounting workability and accuracy.

In stark contrast, the opening 86 (see Fig. 2) is not in a vertical surface. Rather, as is clearly illustrated in Fig. 2 of the Lindberg et al. reference the opening 86 is in a horizontal surface.

Therefore, the Lindberg et al reference does not teach or suggest each and every element of the claimed invention. Therefore, the Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw this rejection of claims 1-2, and 7-8.

C. The 102(e) Lorenz et al. reference rejection

Regarding the rejection of claims 7 and 9, the Examiner alleges that the Lorenz et al. reference teaches the claimed invention. Applicants submit, however, that there are elements of the claimed invention which are neither taught nor suggested by the Lorenz et al. reference.

The Lorenz et al. reference does not teach or suggest the features of the present invention including a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above. As explained above, by providing a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above, a mechanic may then easily align the ducts from the blower unit to an opening in the vehicle bulkhead and affix the blower unit to the vehicle body from the upper side of the lower panel (page 8, line 10 - page 11, line 23), rather, than from below the instrument panel as has conventionally been done.

In this manner, the present invention greatly improves the ease and accuracy of mounting the blower unit in the vehicle. greatly improves the ease and accuracy of mounting the blower unit in the vehicle.

The Lorenz et al. reference appears to disclose a central support 2 and a lower support 3 that are bonded together to form a rigid-box like transverse support (col. 4, lines 49-53). Further, the Lorenz et al. reference discloses a blower cover 4 and an instrument panel covering 5.

The Examiner alleges that the combination of the central support 2, the blower cover

4 and the instrument panel covering 5 corresponds to the claimed upper panel, that the lower support 3 corresponds to the claimed lower panel and that the pedal support block 43 corresponds to the claimed steering support beam.

While the Lorenz et al. reference also appears to disclose a toe board 75 and a bulkhead (item to the left and above of the blower cover 4) in Figure 1 and also appears to disclose an opening in the bulkhead (directly above the blower cover 4) in Figure 1, the Lorenz et al. reference does not teach or suggest the features of the present invention including a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above.

Indeed, the Lorenz et al. reference does not teach or suggest a duct from a blower unit that is capable of being aligned with the opening in the bulkhead, let alone a duct from the blower unit that is accessible from above so that it may be easily aligned with an opening in a bulkhead.

Thus, contrary to the Examiner's allegations, the Lorenz et al. reference does not teach or suggest the features of the present invention including a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above. As explained above, by providing a lower panel that is upwardly open to provide access from above, a mechanic may then easily align the ducts from the blower unit to an opening in the vehicle bulkhead and affix the blower unit to the vehicle body from the upper side of the lower panel (page 8, line 10 - page 11, line 23), rather, than from below the instrument panel as has conventionally been done.

In this manner, the present invention greatly improves the ease and accuracy of mounting the blower unit in the vehicle.

Moreover, regarding new independent claim 43, the Lorenz et al. reference does not appear to teach or suggest the feature of a blower unit that includes a duct for mounting to an

important for taking in outside air and improving mounting workability and accuracy.

Therefore, the Lorenz et al. reference does not teach or suggest each and every element of the claimed invention. Therefore, the Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw this rejection of claims 7 and 9.

III. FORMAL MATTERS AND CONCLUSION

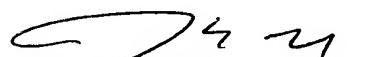
In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 1-4, 7, 9-10, and 29-43, all the claims presently pending in the Application, are patentably distinct over the prior art of record and are in condition for allowance. The Examiner is respectfully requested to pass the above application to issue at the earliest possible time.

Should the Examiner find the Application to be other than in condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned at the local telephone number listed below to discuss any other changes deemed necessary in a telephonic or personal interview.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any deficiency in fees or to credit any overpayment in fees to Attorney's Deposit Account No. 50-0481.

Respectfully Submitted,

Date: 5/27/07



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